

CLARA PEMBERTON;

OR, EUROPEAN LIFE IN INDIA.

A Chapter from a new work about to be published by E. W. Forrest, Esq., late of H. M. Indian Army.

It was a glorious morning in October, the monsoons had subsided, and left all nature clad in verdent beauty. A gentle breeze played among the picturesque branches of groves of noble palms, and wafted upwards sweet odours from the numerous plants and many hued parasites that grew in great luxuriance on the sunny slopes that stretched away towards the sea. Over the tops of the fragrant pomegranate trees could be discerned the silver waters of the bay on whose rippling bosom glided hither and thither the gaily painted bunder boats, and those belonging to the vessels that crowded the harbor, their white sails gleaming in the golden beams of the morning sunlight. In the back ground, rose the wooded Heights of Elephanta, that island so famous for the superb sculpture of its extraordinary caves. I was reclining on an Ottoman in my private office, facing an open window, inhaling the rich perfume of some magnificent wild honeysuckle that hung in festoons, and interlaced the lattice work of the verandah, throwing a cool shade into the apartment, and while thus gazing on the quiet scene below, I was debating in my mind, whither to jump into my palkee and be carried to the fort, or indulge in that oriental luxury,—a bath and siesta during the excessive heat of the noon-day sun;—when a door, that led to the entry which communicated with my tastefully fitted up bachelor quarters, suddenly opened, and Achar Ali, my private orderly, one of the smartest detective officers in the force, entered, making his usual profound salaam. What is it; I inquired, glancing in his direction? A European Sahib wishes to see you in private, was the reply. "Do you know the gentleman?" said I, "without moving, my position." I have seen him before, but it is evident he does not wish to be recognized by any but yourself," quietly answered the Havildar in Hindostanee. Although master of several native languages, he could not speak five consecutive words in English. "Show him into the library, and say I will be with him in a few minutes." He saluted and retired. I knew, it would be useless to conjecture, as to whom the visitor might prove, for my position as chief of police, brought me in contact with all classes of society. I went to my dressing room, and having made a slight addition to my toilet, entered the so-called library, for in fact, it was my smoking room, and general sanctum sanctorum, by a small door partially concealed by a moveable screen, where I had an opportunity of observing my visitor unseen. He was a tall, handsome figure, and apparently about 28 years of age. His features, that were reflected in

an opposite mirror,—for, he was standing with his back towards me—were regular and finely cut; the lower part of the face was concealed by a heavy beard, moustache and whiskers of raven hue, which contrasted strangely with the few curls of rich brown hair, that escaped from beneath the folds of his silken puggree, that encircled his sola topee; his whole figure was familiar to me, but I could not at the moment remember when or where, we had met. My orderly was right, he was for some purpose or other in disguise. "Is this visit intended for the chief of police, or are you the bearer of any message or commission from a friend?" was my enquiry, as I stepped further into the room. At the sound of my voice, he turned, advanced two or three steps towards me, and exclaimed, "Fortescue, are we alone?" I replied in the affirmative. He then removed his hat, and with it, the beard and whiskers alluded to, and disclosed the handsome, though palid features, of my friend and comrade, Oscar Pemberton!"

"What my dear fellow, where on earth did you spring from? Why this disguise? But you are unwell, let me give you some wine. May I insist," said I, filling out a tumbler of iced sherry, and forcing him to take it. He swallowed it evidently with reluctance and more with a view of satisfying me than from any benefit he expected to derive from it, or to remove the depression under which he was laboring.

"Fortescue," said he, as he placed the half emptied glass on the table, "tell me, but do not tamper with me, have you seen or heard anything of Clara?"

"Of Clara!" said I in astonishment. "Why, I understood she was in Europe?"

"She is in Bombay," he replied gloomily.

"Impossible, I must have seen her name among the list of passengers," I reiterated.

"Nevertheless, she is, or was here. Listen while I explain myself more fully,—About six months ago, I was prevailed upon by my family in Europe, much against my better judgement, to allow Clara to pay a visit to England, especially, as I was unable to accompany her. It was a hard trial to me,—parting with one, I so dearly loved, and who,—I had long believed,—loved me, with equal tenderness. I finally consented, and she sailed for England. Four months passed. I had letters from her frequently, during her stay. At length, I received one to say that she was going up to London, to spend a few weeks with some distant relatives of her father's, whom she had met, and that she would embark for Bombay on the mail steamer, that would arrive here on or about the third of the month. Unable to obtain leave of absence. I wrote to Shirlock, of the Ordnance Department, who, with his family, were residing on the Esplanade, and requested him to go on board, and fetch Clara ashore, and give her apartments in his bungalow, until I could make arrangements to send for her. Judge of my sup-

prise and consternation, when I received a letter from my friend Shirlock, to this purport, 'That he had boarded the English mail very shortly after her arrival, but that Mrs. Pemberton was not there!' A lady calling herself Mrs. Percival Clifford, and who answered exactly to the description of my wife, had embarked at Southampton, and had left the vessel with one of the gentlemen passengers in the first bunder boat that had come along side; but no one knew which of the passengers had accompanied her, nor had he up to the time of writing, obtained any clue of her whereabouts. I had a sad foreboding that some scoundrel had either by force or sophistry, persuaded her to leave one, that loved her more than life, in order that she might minister to his licentious passions. And now, my dear fellow, I believe that you are, the only one, that can assist me in this sad emergency. I know that in asking you, I shall not meet with a refusal, or a luke-warm assistance?"

"My dear Oscar, are you not too hasty at jumping at a conclusion? Clara may not have left England, and your friend, may have been misled, in the description given of the lady Mrs. Percival Clifford, that would warrant the supposition, that she was your wife. However, I will leave no stone unturned to ascertain the facts of the case. This, I can easily do, through the agency of my secret police." This appeared to satisfy him, and he thanked me warmly, for taking the whole matter upon my hands. He had left his station, without leave of absence, hence his disguise, and the necessity of his immediate return, or his absence might be discovered by his superiors, and add to further trouble. I obtained from him his wife's portrait, the better to enable me to prosecute my search. It gave him much pain to part with it, but he saw the propriety of my request. I promised to write to him full particulars of what transpired should I succeed in tracing the lady, I was to obtain an interview, and report the result to him. I was to forward her address, so that he could, if he wished, communicate with her in writing. He then took his leave, having to call upon his friend Shirlock, prior to his departure on the evening boat for Susat. Determined to lose no time in ascertaining whether my friend's wife had in any way compromised herself, and if so, to what extent, and with whom, I returned to my office, and sent my orderly to the head clerk, for a list of the passengers arrived by the last overland mail. He returned in a few minutes, and handed it to me, where I found the name of Mrs. Percival Clifford.

"Achar Ali, tell the Purvo Bamchunder, to get this copied into Marrotti. Then go to the Town Major's, Adjutant General's office, and anywhere else, that may be necessary, and find out how many of the persons have gone up country, and how many remained in Bombay, and where they are at present residing, and let me have your